

The Women's Candidate

BYRON WILLIAMS

CHAPTER I.

You have felt the thrill of the chase. Your pulses have leaped like an arrow at the yip, yip of the dogs in close pursuit. You have dashed madly over fences, taking the hardies without regard to personal danger as the prey suddenly sprang from its covert and whisked swiftly into the haze ahead? You—wait!

Pancy! Did you ever behold ten pretty, vivacious like-limbed young women chasing a handsome man—a perfect stranger—through a dogwood swamp, their dresses swirling high above their ankles, their pining shrieks of hysterical laughter?

"Catch him! Catch him!" shrieked a slender blonde to the leading lady running ahead with an athletic stride, her head and shoulders back, her hair rippling in the wind.

"Get him, Jackie!" panted a raven-haired brunette, close behind. "Darn these narrow skirts, anyhow. I'd like to be a man long enough to wear—"

"Oh, gee—this is too much for me!" and a solidly built blonde with a reticent nose and a red sweater toppled onto a bed of moss under a thornapple tree and gasped for breath that persisted in cross-breeding a chorus of chorles struggling for freedom.

"E-yip-laddy-lay-lay!" "Run, girls, run!" "Go it!" "Hot foot!" "Whoop—"

Startled rabbit, aroused from his breakfast of alder shoots, sat up in his bewilderment, took one hasty glance and bounded away into the marsh grasses, his funny little tail bobbing through the squishy places like a meteor of down.

Ahead the men were running freely taking an occasional swift glance over his shoulder at the foremost of the foe. One by one the pursuers were falling by the way, their laughter becoming more and more distant. Suddenly the man swerved behind a great ash along the trail and waited. Through the brush behind he heard the leader coming like a wood nymph, light and airy.

The man crouched. She was upon him now. Agilely he sprang from his hiding place and opened his arms!

With a gurgle of surprise, her cheeks as flaming red as the Oriental poppy on a sunny morning, she tottered with his manly breast. Before she could free herself, the man's lips were at hers, sipping the honey with an ecstasy of delight!

"Oh!" she gasped, struggling. "Were you looking for me?" asked the man, taking toll again and holding her close.

"But—" she cried. "But—" between kisses. And then with one free hand she boxed him soundly on the ear.

He let her go instantly, rubbing his head regretfully. She stood staring at him, her laughter given way to anger. "Sir!" her eyes blazing. "How dare you?"

"Never mind," said the man humbly. "I'll take it back!" coming nearer and reaching for her slim waist. Some lame philosopher has said that a woman with a sense of humor has never been born. In refutation, the girl suddenly broke forth into

"I'll wait until they cramp," he said determinedly, crouching at a respectable distance.

"There ain't a goin' to be any core!" nodding her golden head positively and striving to keep back the blushes. The man seemed saddened.

"Listen," she said soberly. "If I expected ever to see you again, I'd be mortified to death. But I don't, and I'm going to make a clean breast of it, because," with maidenly modesty, "it served me right!"

He waited patiently, nodding, by way of approbation. "You're the first man that's come up to this forest primal in five weeks. We were hunting for moccasin flowers when we caught sight of you."

"Girls! there's a man!" shouted Bess Winters—and in a split of mischief we set out after her. It was only a flash of feminine devilry, that would have died out at once—but when you ran—well, it was so funny we ran after you. I'm something of a sprinter and I—I got in the lead—and I didn't expect you would—would—"

The man grinned. "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush!" he quoted. "I thought you'd best 'em—and I—but I hear voices. Shall we run away?" enticingly.

"By all means, no," she replied severely. "Very well, then, I surrender—to you."

The girl shook her head. "I don't want you."

"What, after chasing me across that confounded swamp!" looking meaningfully at her wet and bedraggled skirt.

She reddened. "It is a woman's privilege to reject—even after she has chased a man to cover."

"And you stand on your rights?" earnestly, but with mirth in his eyes. "I do!" positively.

"Why?" he persisted. "Because!"

He bowed profoundly. "Before woman's final and always conclusive reason I seem to accept the inevitable—but do not deceive, fair lady, things are not always what they seem," quoting. "I have caught you fairly on the first lap. I, too, shall stand on my rights—the rules of the game!"

"Oh, here they are. Come on, girls!" cried an eager voice. One by one nine warm, giggling summer girls came into view, ranging a galaxy of beauty beneath the green trees.

"Did you catch him, Jackie?" cooed the brunette. "Did you?" The golden haired one dropped her eyes.

"She has—or, she did!" said the man, speaking for her. "Is this the pack?"

"Who are you, sir, that dares call us dogs?" demanded a red-lipped blonde with hair like flax.

"I am the fox!" replied the man. He arose to his feet and put his thumbs into the armpits of his vest, a habit he had, facing them mockingly.

"Look!" screamed the short one. "he is an officer!" Jackie started.

With a deft movement the brunette reached forth and laid back the lapel of his coat, peering at a tiny gold star, engraved.

"Oh, girls," she cried dramatically, a ring of mischief in her voice, "look who's here; HIS HONOR, THE MAYOR!"

CHAPTER II.

"The jury will arise and be sworn!" "Jackie" Vining, the judge, waited impatiently.

"What's the matter with you, girls? Mabel, Lucile—don't you know you're jurymen—er, on the jury. Stand up! There!" with satisfaction. "Now raise your hands—no, no; your right hands! That's better. You solemnly swear, cross your hearts, hope-to-die, you will carefully weigh the evidence in this case and render a verdict according to the statutes—or, according to what you think this wretch deserves?" maliciously.

Six pretty heads nodded, in unison. "He seated," said the judge sternly. "His honor, the mayor," sat on a soap box in the center of the front veranda, a mere man in the hands of the enemy, waiting his fate and trying to look unhappy.

"What's the charge," demanded Alice Mason, appointed by the court to defend the prisoner.

The judge moved uneasily in her chair. Then, in a low, cutting tone she said: "He's a thief!"

The mayor looked up apprehensively. "I object," he protested, "to the court's statement of the case. It is irregular in—"

"Order in the court!" interrupted the judge. "Who's running this case?"

The man lowered his eyes, accepting the inevitable. "This defendant," began Jackie, "is a thief. He stole a kiss from—from—"



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The Mayor.

thing about osculation at close range, let alone long-distance kissing. Young lady, have you ever been kissed?"

"The objection is sustained," gurgled the court, mercifully. The witness blushed rosily.

"I refuse to answer," she said, stubbornly. "On what grounds?" demanded the judge.

"On the grounds of self-implication and coercion," she snapped, her chin in the air.

"The court reverses itself," easily. "Witness need not incriminate herself. Ask the next question, attorney."

"To the best of your knowledge and belief," began the state's attorney, picking a hurr from her skirt and tossing it carelessly to the floor, "were the police you heard speak as to make you think that somebody was being, er—kissed?"

"Wait!" interrupted the defense. "I object on the grounds—on the—it's a hypothetical question and without proper foundation in fact," impressively.

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"If, at the end of the ten days, you have acquitted yourself honorably, you may go your way in peace. Have you anything to say for yourself?" His honor arose submissively.

"I accept the terms," he said, eagerly. "I protest—but I accept."

"And should you desert," continued the judge, "I shall not hesitate to use this evidence against you," pulling from the front of her shirtwaist a bulky document. "Possibly you may recognize it!" tauntingly.

The prisoner gasped. "My bill!"

"Yes!" replied the judge, piercing him with a cold look of scorn, "you may well say, 'My bill!'"

Not the Christabel They Wanted. One London woman who had named her dog Christabel Pankhurst recently wrote a postcard to a friend, saying: "Christabel Pankhurst is too much of a worry; I shall have to send her away." Before long three detectives had called at the house whence the card issued to find, not the elusive suffragette, whom the English police were searching for, but only her name namesake!

Her Fellow Feeling. The children had been disobedient and troublesome, and the mother, instead of punishing them, brought them into line by telling them a pathetic story of orphans who had no home. Little Jack, in tears, rolled under the sofa to hide his grief. Mary stood out a little longer, and then called: "Come on out, Jack; I'm crying, too."—Lippincott's.

A New Evil. Husband—"So long as you went around to the polls to vote, why didn't you do it?" Enfranchised Wife—"Another lady was using the booth."—Life.

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"How Dare You, Sir?"

peals of laughter, backing away from him until she leaned against a tree trunk for support.

The man kept his eyes on her. "Anyhow," he said finally, "I like the game. Who invented it?"

Coming closer, he reached forth his hand and touched her lightly on the arm.

"Tag!" he cried, and started to run. The girl sat down unceremoniously in a tangle of grape vines.

"I had my fingers crossed!" she protested, and the man came back, discomfited.

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